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ABSTRACT

According to the Advisory Board of the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce (EQW), young people in the United States are losing out in the job market, too often having to settle for intermittent, part-time jobs, routinized work, low wages, and few if any benefits. This circumstance has been the result of a net loss of 1.65 million manufacturing jobs over the last 10 years, an impending loss of an additional one million jobs in the military, and a general and persistent decline in the wages paid to young people. Therefore, a federal initiative should be developed that requires neither new funds nor another government agency, relies on the natural functioning of the labor market to create better opportunities for young workers, and lowers the costs to employers of screening and hiring young workers. The center proposes that postsecondary education vouchers for young workers be created. The vouchers would be earned by sustained employment and paid for by the reallocation of federal funds already budgeted for student aid and vocational education. The awards to students would be larger than the present Pell grants, since students would have to work for them. Such a program would be designed to address the needs of both youths and employers; it would benefit young people, the work force, and postsecondary programs for education and training, and it would help to ensure the future of the country. (KC)

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EQW POLICY STATEMENT

ED 377 403

A Statement by the Advisory Board of the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce (EQW)

Making Good Jobs for Young People a National Priority

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The Problem

The nation's young are losing out in the job market, too often having to settle for intermittent, part-time jobs, routinized work, low wages, and few if any benefits.

The Challenge

To develop a federal initiative that:

- requires neither new fu… another government ag…
- relies on the natural fu… of the labor market to e… opportunities for young w…
- lowers the costs to empl… of screening and hiring young workers.

A Proposal

To create postsecondary education vouchers for young workers to be earned by sustained employment and to be paid for by the reallocation of federal funds already budgeted for student aid and vocational education.

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Making Good Jobs for Young People a National Priority

Time, technology, and international competition have changed the prospects of American workers. To be without high skills and educational credentials means a succession of intermittent—often part-time—jobs, routinized work, and low wages. Work and learning are disconnected, employers and schools mismatched, and the rewards for hard work diminished.

We believe it is the young—those men and women aged 16 to 26, still in the process of crossing the threshold to purposeful employment—who are bearing disproportionately the costs associated with economic change. The young, particularly those who do not proceed directly to college, discover that there is no room at the inn—or in the factory, office, or government bureau. The manufacturing jobs that once rivaled white-collar work in pay and status are no longer available, and many introductory jobs for the young no longer provide benefits and opportunities for advancement.

Our message is simple: given the current redefining of national and budgetary priorities, making good jobs for young people must be placed at the top of the list.

In the world of job rationing that increasingly disadvantages the nation's young workers—black and white, schooled and unschooled, skilled and unskilled—it is the young who are being asked to prove themselves in a series of part-time and minimum-wage jobs, just to have their applications for permanent positions taken seriously. Not surprisingly, the time between the conclusion of schooling and the securing of a permanent job is getting longer. The link between formal schooling and work is becoming more tenuous, while the possession of the "proper" postsecondary credentials is becoming more essential.

The long-term challenge remains subsumed by the phrase: "America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!" This national report argued that Americans were falling behind in the race to create the kinds of jobs that produced both individual and national wealth. Schools were failing to teach the skills that increasingly would matter. Firms were neither creating enough high-skilled jobs nor supplying the continuous training that a skilled workforce required.

However, there is a more immediate challenge: to create enough good, introductory jobs leading to real futures to ensure that the young gain purposeful introduction to the world of work. Twenty years from now it will be these younger workers who, in their thirties and forties, must bear the brunt of paying for the retirement of their parents' generations. If they are increasingly shut out of the labor market—or even if their introduction is simply delayed by a series of dead-end jobs that devalue their skills and education—they will inherit an economy that expects more of them than they will be able to deliver.

The economy and the young's place within it have been the focus of much of EQW's research.[1] We asked EQW's staff to examine the demographics of the youth labor market, focusing on how much and in what ways opportunities for young workers have changed over the last ten years. Research sponsored by EQW re-examined the ways in which schools contribute to a high-quality workforce and the ways in which a purposeful and early introduction to work helps prepare young people for the

[1] For a general discussion of the background on the youth labor market, see "Youth Apprenticeships and School-to-Work Transition: Current Knowledge and Legislative Strategy" by Paul Osterman and Maria Iannozzi (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1993).

labor market. EQW researchers, at our request, also talked to employers across the country about what they expect—and what they think they get—when they hire young workers. They helped to assess the value-added produced by the nation's investment in vocational education. They asked what other nations can teach the U.S. about the linking of work and learning. And they sought a better understanding of the military's specific role in the creation of a trained workforce. From their research we have distilled seven principal findings to help frame a national policy in support of youth employment.

1. Today's young workers face job rationing and declining real wages. By the 1990s, young workers were falling substantially behind preceding generations in terms of the quality and nature of the jobs available to them.[2] The only advantage enjoyed by young workers today is that there are fewer of them. A decade ago, there were more than 27 million young people aged 16 to 26 who were not enrolled in school but engaged in the labor market. Today, that same youth cohort (aged 16 to 26) numbers just 22 million. Indeed, with fewer young people competing for jobs, their participation in the labor force has actually increased slightly, from 69 percent in 1981 to 70 percent in 1991, while the proportion of those working full-time increased from 75 percent to 79 percent over the same decade.

Offsetting this slight increase in employment, however, were three significant losses that will substantially disadvantage this and succeeding generations of young people.

- **A net loss of 1.65 million manufacturing jobs.** Ten years ago, 19 percent of young workers who were not enrolled in school were employed in full-time manufacturing jobs. Today, only 15 percent of youth work full-time in manufacturing—and their average pay now lags behind the service and finance industries, which manufacturing salaries previously surpassed in 1981. At the same time, the proportion of full-time manufacturing jobs held by all young workers aged 16 to 26 fell from 23 percent in 1981 to 16 percent in 1991—a clear example of the kind of job and work rationing that has come to shape the youth labor market.

- **An impending loss of an additional 1 million jobs in the military.**[3] In 1987, the military services enlisted almost 300,000 new recruits—for the most part young people with high school degrees but little subsequent postsecondary education—to maintain its peace-time high of 2.2 million members. By 1993, these annual accessions to the military had been reduced by one-third—100,000 fewer recruits each year—as the total number of personnel shrank to 1.7 million members. This number is expected to drop even further—to 1.4 million by 1995—as the military continues to downsize. What will be lost by the end of the decade are almost one million good jobs for young people: jobs with good pay, excellent benefits, opportunities to acquire technical skills, and further educational benefits after service.

- **A general and persistent decline in the wages paid to young people.** Compared with their counterparts of a decade ago, today's young people are likely to have jobs for which they are paid less. When their education, gender, race or ethnicity, and industry of employment are taken into account, young workers today earn, on the average, more than 10 percent less in constant dollars than their counterparts a decade ago.

[2] This finding is based on an analysis of data from the *Educational Supplements to the Current Population Survey* for 1981 and 1991, administered by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Bureau of the Census.

[3] See Janice Laurence, "The Military: Purveyor of Fine Skills and Compartment for a Few Good Men" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

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2. When schools combine work and learning, their graduates earn more. High schools and vocational education programs contribute to the labor market success of their graduates principally by providing strong academic preparation and exposure to labor markets.[1] The EQW analysis of student labor market outcomes asked what kinds of graduates from what kinds of schools performed well in the labor market. The key finding is that academic preparation in combination with workforce knowledge and experience boosts the future earnings of non-college-bound high school graduates and vocational education students at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. For those vocational education students who, after graduation, remained with the same employer, there is both a rise in subsequent earnings and an increase in job tenure—resulting in less turnover and fewer spells of unemployment.[2] It is not the specific nature of the training but the fact that the student holds a job while still in school that seems to matter most in boosting subsequent pay. Measures of academic performance—graduation from high school, participation in an academic program, and strong performance on achievement tests—are associated with higher earnings in subsequent jobs. More generally, exposure to labor markets and a knowledge of work preparedness imparted while still in high school—working for pay, knowing how to find a job, attending schools that receive listings of local job openings—also lead to higher earnings. Race, gender, and family income continue to significantly influence subsequent earnings, particularly for African-Americans attending schools in which they are the majority. Finally, there is clear evidence that the educational institution *does* matter; although the individual characteristics that make success-story schools are not always identifiable, significant differences between schools do affect the future earnings of their graduates.

3. Young technicians, in particular, must learn their skills on the job. Technicians represent a special case in a changed economy.[3] Today, the fastest growing occupations in the U.S. are dominated by "the new crafts"—computer programmers, engineering technicians, specialists in medical and radiological technologies, and micro-computer support technicians, to name a few. On the whole, technicians are well-educated, responsive, and responsible workers who are critical to the success of their organizations. What they know about work as well as their technical specialties have, for the most part, been learned through experience. In the field, most knowledge about work is passed on orally, from skilled practitioner to novice, even in those occupations and specialties requiring an associate's or a bachelor's degree. So strong is this pattern of learning on the job that even educators and mangers are unsure about what technicians need to know.

4. The military boosts employment prospects primarily by providing post-service educational vouchers. The military's contribution to the youth labor market is not primarily through technical training, but a more fundamental investment in post-service education.[4] A close examination of the relationship between military service and subsequent earnings reveals that most veterans do not immediately fare better

[1] See David Crawford, Amy Johnson, and Anita Summers, "Schools and Labor Market Outcomes" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

[2] See David Stevens, "The School-to-Work Transition of High School and Community College Vocational Program Completers: 1990-1992" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

[3] See Stephen R. Barley, "The New Crafts: The Rise of the Technical Labor Force and Its Implication for the Organization of Work" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1992) and "What Do Technicians Do?" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

[4] See Stephen R. Barley, "Will Military Reduction Create Shortages of Trained Personnel and Harm the Career Prospects of American Youth?" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

in the labor market than their peers without military experience. Employers state that they seek out veterans when searching for new employees; however, veterans enjoy no advantage in terms of decreased spells of unemployment. What the military does provide, however, are good, well-paying jobs with benefits for young people while they serve—experience that employers value, whether it is gained in the civilian labor market or in the military. More important, service in the military seems to yield a fundamental attitude shift, creating in the process aspirations for further education and the discipline and comportment skills necessary for a successful worklife. The most tangible rewards for military service thus become the educational vouchers awarded to personnel upon leaving. It is this education, for the most part received in traditional postsecondary institutions, that makes the greatest difference in subsequent earnings and related labor market experiences for veterans.

5. In unregulated labor markets, youth apprenticeships are principally used to screen prospective workers. The most extensive experience with a wholesale application of a youth apprenticeship system in an unregulated labor market like our own is Britain's Youth Training Scheme (YTS). The British demonstrated that a government with sufficient will and a strong legislative majority can rapidly create a national system of school and work initiatives that involves most employers. However, YTS could not control the skimming of the best talent in the programs by employers who offered regular employment to quick-learning apprentices before they completed their stated course of training. So pervasive was this "internal poaching" that to have completed an apprenticeship often became the mark of an inferior worker—one whom the training firm did not think was worth hiring for its own ends. In general, the British experience suggests that employers were more likely to use the apprenticeship system as a screening device rather than as an opportunity to provide real job training. It also ultimately shows that incentives for employer training often conflict with their incentives to skim valuable talent.

Our conclusion is that a national youth apprenticeship program like Britain's Youth Training Scheme would not solve school-to-work problems in this country. Not only would it suffer from internal poaching, but also it would reduce the incentives for employers to invest in firm-specific training, would delay the transition of young workers into the workforce, and would create a new bureaucracy.

6. Employer-centered work-based learning programs can succeed. What works, however, are apprenticeship programs at the local level targeted at disadvantaged youth. As EQW research has documented, among employers participating in pilot local work-based learning programs there is a well-spring of support both for the initiatives themselves and for the quality of the young workers they attract.[2] Most participating firms are small, taking just one or two students at a time, whom they find almost without exception to be productive and contributing employees. The recruitment of firms to a program is most often accomplished by word-of-mouth and the use of informal networks, and most employers explain that their reason for participating is to provide a community service. They often echo

[1] See Peter Cappelli, "British Lessons for School-to-Work Transition Policy in the U.S." (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1993).

[2] See Irene Lyon and Joan Wills, "School-to-Work Transition: Lessons on Recruiting and Sustaining Employer Involvement" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

other employer complaints about the high schools with which they worked, citing that too often the participating schools are not sufficiently organized or do not attach high priority to the program. Yet, a majority of these firms report that they would take additional students later and would recommend the program to other small-business owners.

7. Most employers, however, have little interest in hiring young workers.[10] Most employers who offer permanent jobs want proven workers, whose most available proxy for labor market success is age and a succession of temporary jobs of increasing complexity. There is a clear favoring of job applicants in their mid- to late-twenties, either enrolled in or having completed some postsecondary education at a four- or two-year college. Most employers report that they would be willing to take on younger workers only if they were screened—for drugs as well as for aptitude—and, if possible, certified by some agency other than a public high school in terms of the skills they would bring with them to the workplace. The implication is that the economic advantage of being able to hire a younger worker at a lower wage is more than offset by the cost of screening applicants and retaining their services long enough to recoup the cost of initial hiring and training.

In sum, students successfully cross the threshold to purposeful work when they attend strong schools, when they have access to reliable information about jobs and the world of work, and when their learning is combined with focused work experiences. We believe, therefore, that the future quality of the American workforce depends on the sustained creation of more purposeful work for young people—more and better jobs that confer status and opportunity as well as benefits and training. To make this happen, employers will again have to be convinced that employing young people is beneficial for everyone, themselves included.

A decade ago, it would have been sufficient to appeal to an employer's civic pride and commitment to community service. Principal responsibility would have been borne by the nation's largest employers who, for more than four decades, have also been the nation's employers of choice. They would have established the partnerships with schools, created the jobs and summer programs, and made certain that their executives led the community organizations charged with fixing what time and neglect had allowed to become broken.

The downsizing of corporate America has fundamentally changed this role for larger employers, who are shedding rather than creating jobs. They are more concerned with the retraining of surviving workforces than with the training and education of new workers. In accord with their growing importance to the nation's economy, smaller firms must now shoulder greater responsibility for the quality of the workforce on which their own prosperity depends. They are enterprises that, for the most part, have relied on others to supply them with skilled labor: on the training programs of large firms and the military; on the efforts of schools, colleges, and technical institutes; and, perhaps most of all, on their employees' own ingenuity and capacity for learning on the job.

[10] See Robert Zemsky, "What Employers Want: Employer Perspectives on Youth, the Youth Labor Market, and Prospects for a National System of Youth Apprenticeships" (Philadelphia: National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, 1994).

In the America of the next century, small businesses will have to be contributors to as well as harvesters of the nation's supply of skilled workers. Playing these roles will, in part, require a significant change in attitude and perception on the part of the small-business owner. They must become more purposeful public and economic citizens and more articulate and better organized stakeholders of the public schools, insisting that those institutions make the reforms necessary to better link learning and work. They need to seek out partnerships with individual schools—even individual programs and teachers—lending their experience to the task of identifying and then conveying what it will take to be a good worker. They need to work with schools in making jobs available to the young, as well as reinforce the importance of academic success as a precursor to successful employment.

Good citizenship will not in itself create good jobs for young people. What will be required in today's economy are real, tangible incentives that will make responding enterprises demonstrably more profitable. If the nation expects its small businesses to hire and help train the young, then national, state, and local initiatives taken to foster youth employment will have to meet the needs of the employing community. The challenge is to create youth employment initiatives that encourage employer participation by making them clients of the initiatives themselves. Employers were frank and forthcoming when they told us they needed:

- young workers who have been academically well-tested and practically certified;
- reliable work-related screening mechanisms capable of reducing the costs and uncertainties associated with hiring young workers; and
- young workers who will stick with the job—who accept employment as an obligation as well as an opportunity.

A Proposal to Strengthen Employer Incentives to Hire Young Workers

What employers require, in short, are measures that lower the transactional costs associated with hiring unproven young workers whom many believe are not prepared to take their jobs seriously. It is to help create these conditions that we propose a major reallocation of federal student aid and vocational education funds to establish a program of vouchers for postsecondary education to be earned through successful and sustained employment by young workers aged 16 to 26. By suggesting a voucher system in which young people *earn* grant aid through workforce participation, this proposal extends and makes more explicit the linking of work and postsecondary education. Its primary intent is to help young people—particularly those who cannot or do not plan to follow a direct path from high school to college—acquire the work experience and comportment skills employers seek while earning credit toward future education and training opportunities. By offering what is in effect a deferred wage supplement, the initiative is intended to both expand work opportunities for the young and to increase the likelihood that young workers will make a more sustained commitment to their jobs, thus reducing significantly the costs borne by employers for screening, hiring, training, and supervising young workers.

Three assumptions underlie this proposal:

- that any proposed program must draw on existing funds—there will be no new federal moneys;
- that a proposed program must be simple to administer—there should be no new federal bureaucracies;
- that in order to be successful, a program cannot be financially or administratively burdensome for employers or for postsecondary education and training institutions.

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For the sake of administrative simplicity and in order to cast the net of opportunity wider, all youth between the ages of 16 and 26 automatically would earn credit toward vouchers by holding any job for a period of nine months or longer. Vouchers could be earned on a part-time or full-time basis over the prescribed ten-year period. Earnings would be tracked through social security and unemployment insurance records and then translated into grant credits.

Our proposed voucher program would have five attributes:

- recognizing that participants must work for their aid, vouchers should offer larger awards than traditional Pell Grants;
- the maximum financial award for which vouchers could be exchanged would increase based on length of employment;
- vouchers—like traditional federal student aid grants—would be need-based;
- there would be a window of time, based on age, in which vouchers could be earned;
- within the broader time frame for earning vouchers, there would be no additional time limits placed on the use of grant aid, as in the current Pell program, and students would maintain access to their grant aid as long as the enrolling institution believes there is satisfactory progress toward graduate study—that is, the grant aid could be expended for postsecondary undergraduate education or training only.

Because the value of the educational vouchers must be significant enough to encourage young people to stay in jobs and acquire good work experience and habits, a participant should become eligible after completing, for example, the equivalent of nine months of full-time employment with a single employer for an award that exceeds the maximum one-year Pell grant. In the current academic year, a student can receive a maximum Pell grant of $2,300. For the first nine months of participation, for example, a worker might earn a maximum baseline award of approximately 60 percent greater than a traditional Pell grant, or $3,750. Participants who remain with their employers for two years would then become eligible for an additional amount: baseline plus 50 percent, which in this case is $5,625. For a third year of work with the same employer, the participant would become eligible for a third amount equal to the two-year rate plus 50 percent, or $8,437. According to this schedule, the maximum possible grant aid to be earned in the voucher program would be $15,812, which represents an increase of approximately 35 percent over the maximum total Pell grant aid a student can receive. The figures cited here would be the *maximum* grants a young person could earn toward postsecondary education or training; the actual amounts would be adjusted downward, according to federal standards, based on the assessed need of participants when they enter the workforce.

This program is designed to address the needs of both youth and employers; it would benefit young people, the workforce, and postsecondary programs for education and training. For this reason, it would be appropriate that the funds supporting the program would be drawn from a resource pool that extends beyond existing federal grant programs for student financial aid. Such a support base might pool some or all of the funds from the Pell grant program, from federal vocational education programs, and from the Jobs Training Partnership Act. Consistent with making good jobs for young people a national priority, our proposal would reallocate federal funds now devoted to student grants to a program based on earning grants through meaningful work.

The employers who were the focus of much of our research told us that they would not tolerate "pay or play" schemes that required their participation—they would be neither taxed nor mandated into joining programs they did not believe to be in their own interest and which would work against the objective of increasing employment. Instead, we recommend an alternative course of action: the reallocation of funds from existing federal programs for student aid to provide incentives for employers to invest in youth labor and to take greater responsibility for the young's introduction to work and employment.

To repeat, what is required is a general strategy for involving employers in large numbers, for linking schools with the employer community, and for facilitating the transition from school to work. What the nation requires first and foremost, however, is a national commitment that makes American young people a priority. As a nation, we must stop securing the present at the expense of our children's future—it seems inconceivable to us, the members of EQW's National Advisory Board, that America can continue to send the bill for sustaining its current standard of living to its children. If, as a nation, we are not prepared to invest in the human capital of young people, then we have in fact failed to secure the nation's future.

***The National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce is advised by a ten-member national panel who, collectively, serve as the author of* EQW Policy Statements:**

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EQW Policy Statements

EQW Policy Statements, authored by the EQW National Advisory Board, synthesize the Center's related research and offer policy recommendations informed by those findings. "Making Good Jobs for Young People a National Priority" tackles the problem of meaningful and sustained youth employment; the next *EQW Policy Statement*, tentatively titled "Private Matters, Public Policy," will explore the interaction of employer practices and skill demands in the economy. Other essays will cover the growth of the technical workforce and the uncertain measurement of training and its role as a gauge to measure the nation's investment in human capital.

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The Research Connection

EQW Policy Statements are based on findings that emerge from EQW research. The following *EQW Working Papers* contain the reports and analyses which supported "Making Good Jobs for Young People a National Priority":

WP03 "The New Crafts: The Rise of the Technical Labor Force and its Implication for the Organization of Work" by Stephen Barley

WP14 "Youth Apprenticeships and School-to-Work Transition: Current Knowledge and Legislative Strategy" by Paul Osterman and Maria Iannozzi

WP17 "What Do Technicians Do?" by Stephen Barley

WP19 "British Lessons for School-to-Work Transition Policy in the U.S." by Peter Cappelli

WP22 "What Employers Want: Employer Perspectives on Youth, the Youth Labor Market, and Prospects for a National System of Youth Apprenticeships" by Robert Zemsky

WP25 "The Military: Purveyor of Fine Skills and Comportment for a Few Good Men" by Janice Laurence

WP26 "Will Military Reduction Create Shortages of Trained Personnel and Harm the Career Prospects of American Youth?" by Stephen Barley

WP27 "The School-to-Work Transition of High School and Community College Vocational and Non-Vocational Program Completers: 1990-1992" by David Stevens

WP28 "School Lessons, Work Lessons: Recruiting and Sustaining Employer Involvement in School-to-Work Programs" by Irene Lynn and Joan Wills

WP33 "Schools and Labor Market Outcomes" by David Crawford, Amy Johnson, and Anita Summers

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